

Firefly Scientists' Garden

Environmental Education at The Lemberg Children's Center

FEBRUARY IN THE GARDEN



While it may still seem like winter – and it is, with the chilling breeze, blowing snow, and icy ground – February is a time of excitement in the garden. We are finalizing our planting plans and categorizing our seeds, organizing our sheds, and cleaning up our greenhouse, preparing for the busy season that's so close! Even though we have yet to plant anything in the garden beds, the beginning of March means it's time to start seeds, and we want to be ready.

LEARNING THIS MONTH

Indoor Seed Exploration

It may be cold outside, but that doesn't mean we can't get ready for spring by investigating seeds! We started our lesson by discussing what we already know about them - friends pointed out different types of plants that grow from seeds (pumpkins, wheat, flowers, etc.) and that seeds need water, soil, sunlight, and time to grow. We then read *I Am A Seed* by Albert David Sutton, imitating the seed in the story by using our bodies to act out a bee pollinating a flower, the seed sleeping in the winter, and the sprouting out of the ground in the spring.

After sharing what we learned about the seed's lifecycle, we gathered at the tables and passed around various seeds - carrots, beets, and sugar snap peas, noticing the variety of shapes, sizes, and textures. We used our senses to explore, touching, seeing, and smelling.



"Smells earthy!"

Then, each student received a small planter, which they filled with soil. Every student had a green bean seed to plant and water.



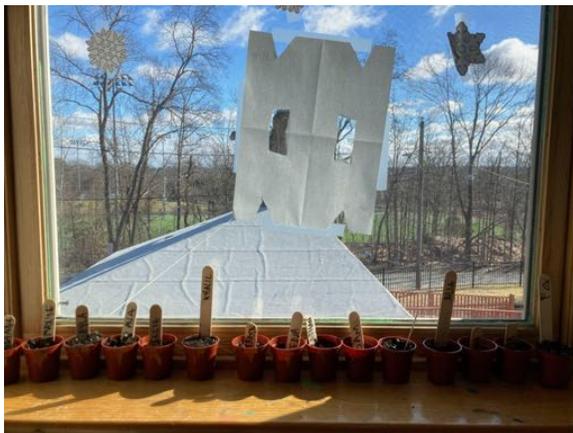
We gave each of our pots a label and water!

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Finally, all the planters set up shop in the sun on a windowsill. We can't wait to watch them grow!



Our seeds are soaking up some sun!

Fun with Fungi

A magical world exists beneath our feet? There are tiny threads connecting plants that communicate? Yes and yes!

In the classrooms, we delved into the mystical, fantastic world of fungi. Before reading our book, we shared information we had learned before like how mushrooms are fungi, you can't eat some of them because they are poisonous, and some can even glow in the dark! We discussed how fungi are very important in the garden because some mushrooms decompose— which means to break down— old things, like trees.

After introducing the subject, we read *We Are Fungi* by Christine Nishiyama, a book with fun illustrations that discusses what fungi are, their growth process, and the variety of fungi that exist.

The children learned that, unlike plants, fungi do not need sunlight to grow and instead need lots of moisture and “food” to grow on. We used our hands to pretend to be the cap, stalk, gills, spores, and mycelium (a very fun word to say). Passing around pieces of edible mushrooms from the store, we smelled, observed, and felt the different parts of a cap. One student observed that the gills looked like eyelashes.



We are FUNGI!

We then gathered at the tables to create spore prints! Working with both big (portabella) and small (button) mushrooms, we peeled the caps to reveal the gills.

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"Gills down."

The students worked together to place the mushrooms face-down on white pieces of paper. Everyone dabbed a droplet of water to keep the mushroom damp. Finally, we covered the caps with containers to help the spores stay in place. The next day, we uncovered and discovered brown spore prints underneath the caps!



We covered up our mushrooms.

We are FUN-guys in the garden.

Seed Balls!

We planted our first seeds of the season outside! What? Isn't it too cold? Well, we mixed up a recipe for seed balls, a combination of clay, soil, and water that creates a perfect environment for a seed to grow. It acts like a coat to protect the seed until there's enough warmth and sunlight to sprout.

In the classrooms, we read *Seeds* by Vijaya Khisty Bodach and discussed what we have been learning about seeds. We acted out a seed sprouting, with shoots, leaves, flowers, fruits, and roots. Friends asked questions like "Why does a seed grow?" and made comments about the variety of seeds there are in the world.



Everyone got to scoop in clay and soil.

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We then went outside to mix up our seed balls. Everyone scooped in some clay and some soil. And, together, we poured in water and mixed it until it was combined. Rolling a small ball, we placed our seeds inside - friends planted Nasturtiums, Sunflowers, or Zinnias. Once our seeds were comfortably covered, we found sunny spots to place them in the garden. We discussed how in the future we could make more with wildflowers and secretly plant flowers wherever needed more green!



A finished seed ball

Good luck growing, little seeds!

Family Garden Day

Right now, the garden is nicely tucked away and cozy. However, before we know it, spring will be here. Looking forward, we will have our first Family Garden Day on April 6th - mark your calendars! We will have lots of exciting garden prep and planting to do.

Please reach out to Sarah if you have any questions at secksteinindik@brandeis.edu.

Thank you to our many wonderful alumni donors and friends!

